

Highlands Newspaper

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Thurs., Feb. 27, 2014

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Town out to collect delinquent utilities; sewer connections

In an effort to clean up its books and stop the bleeding of its delinquent utility and sewer accounts, the Town Board has decided to play hardball with citizens who don't pay their bills.

At Thursday night's Town

Board meeting, commissioners voted unanimously to write-off the \$9,269.92 in utility bills that are by NC Statute uncollectable after three years; in this case as of December 31, 2013. However, they agreed to post those who are

delinquent for 2014 onward in the newspaper possibly every six months and to turn water off for those who have delinquent sewer connection fees.

Utilities

"The ones that were writ-

ten off on Thursday passed their 3-year limit at the end of December 2013 and were uncollected since 2010," said Town Manager Bob Frye who said he inherited this problem when he was hired.

•See DELINQUENT page 8

Highlands test scores well above state average

By Brittany Burns

Recently released NC School Report Cards from the 2012-13 school year show that Highlands students scored on average higher on state tests in both reading and math last school year than students in other districts across the state.

In grades three through eight, 51.5 percent of Highlands students scored at or above grade level on the End-of-Grade (EOG) reading tests. Highlands scored nearly 8 percent higher than the state average of 43.9 percent.

Compared to the scores of the district, Highlands students scored 5.9 percent higher overall in Reading.

For math, at 46.7 percent of students scoring at or above

•See HIGHLANDS page 4

HS boys win conference – lose at state



After winning the Little Smoky Mountain Conference outright, the Boys Basketball team opened the state tournament Monday night at Highlands Gym against Lincoln Charter. Highlands lost 47-51. After placing 2nd in the Little Smoky Mountain Conference, the Girls Basketball team played Robbinsville prior to the Boys game Monday night. They lost 34 to 56.

Photo by Lisa Osteen

Federal 'Duke' coal ash probe expands to Asheville ponds & environmental officials

By Kirk Ross
Carolina Public Press

Nearly two dozen current and former department officials, including NC Department of Natural Resources' Asheville region supervisors for water quality and aquifer protection, were

included in a series of subpoenas issued Tuesday as federal prosecutors expanded their probe of the state's oversight of Duke Energy's 32 coal ash ponds.

Federal prosecutors have expanded their probe of the state's oversight of Duke Energy's 32

coal ash ponds, including two at its Asheville Power Station.

A series of subpoenas issued Tuesday and obtained by news organizations through public records requests indicate not only an expanded investigation into

•See COAL ASH page 5

Town asked about downed trees at 200 Main

For the past few months the old High Mountain Lodge soon to be reopened as 200 Main has been getting a facelift and is on schedule to open June 1 of this year.

In January the Planning Board – as part of its new Appearance Commission duties – approved the landscape plan presented by Landscape Architect Hank Ross. Ross discussed the placement and look of the pool that will be constructed on the Oak Street side of the property, the placement of two terraces on the front lawn of the complex along Main Street and renovations of the honeymoon suite bordering Third Street.

On Wednesday, Feb. 19, eight large trees on the front lawn of the property were cut down – six white pine and two dead hemlocks. Citizens called the town but Town Planner Josh Ward said he hadn't been told about the need to cut down the trees nor was a permit obtained.

However, Ross said he told the Planning Board that three trees would be removed to make way for the terraces and 40 new trees would be planted in their place to offer guests greater privacy from Main Street. Town Planner Ward said he doesn't

•See TREES page 3

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• THE PLATEAU'S POSITION •

• FORUM •

NC Small Business Owners go to White House to discuss Medicaid expansion

North Carolina small business owners met with policymakers and business advocates at the White House Monday, Feb. 24 to discuss the importance of expanding the state's Medicaid program.

"Medicaid expansion is an important issue facing my business and many others here in North Carolina. Not only will it level the playing field for us small guys, but it will actually pump money into North Carolina's economy and that will boost my bottom line," said Janine Berger, Practice Manager of Clayton Pediatric Dentistry in Clayton. "I don't have much free time, but I'm making time to fly to Washington to meet with lawmakers to discuss this issue and let them know how important it is our Medicaid program is expanded."

In June 2012, the Supreme Court gave states the option to expand eligibility for Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act to those earning up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level. For those states that choose to expand their Medicaid programs, the federal government pays 100 percent of the cost for those newly eligible for Medicaid from 2014 to 2016, gradually decreasing to 90 percent in 2020 and beyond. Many states, including North Carolina, have chosen not to expand their Medicaid programs, denying eligibility for millions of low-wage working adults who otherwise would have qualified under the healthcare law.

Research has shown that expanding Medicaid eligibility would be a boon to the state's economy and small firms by leveling the play field for small businesses, creating a healthier and more productive workforce and pumping new money into the economy. Medicaid expansion would cover 377,000 more individuals in North Carolina by 2016, many of them low-wage working adults. Because so many workers would qualify for Medicaid, small firms that can't afford to offer their employees insurance would be better able to compete for workers with big businesses that can offer insurance. It would also encourage a more productive workforce by extending health benefits to millions and stimulate economic growth by injecting money back

into the state's economy.

If a state does not expand its Medicaid program, other states that have already approved expansion will get the benefit of federal tax dollars from states that don't expand. This means a significant loss of jobs and revenue.

"The bottom line is that expanding Medicaid in North Carolina would lower insurance costs for small businesses and encourage a more robust workforce," said Rhett Buttle, Vice President of External Affairs for Small Business Majority. "This would enrich the economy and create an environment much friendlier to many small employers who currently struggle to afford health insurance. With lower insurance

costs and healthier workers, small employers can worry less about healthcare and concentrate on growing their businesses and creating jobs."

About Small Business Majority

Small Business Majority is a national small business organization, founded and run by small business owners, to support America's 28 million small businesses. We conduct extensive opinion and economic research and work with our rapidly growing network of small business owners across the country to ensure their voices are an integral part of the public policy debate. Learn more about us on Wikipedia and follow us on Twitter and Facebook.

• LETTERS •

Venture capitalism

Dear Editor,

Franklin's new mayor, Bob Scott, said he wants to encourage more young people to become entrepreneurs in the city of

Franklin.

The only problem I can see with his idea is that for it to work well, it would need a larger population base and probably

would have to include the entire county rather than the somewhat small population of Franklin alone.

There appears to be another problem in that we don't have any venture capitalists in our area, or none that I know of. Ideas are sometimes born in a garage as we know but those ideas were brought to fruition by investment groups willing to take a chance on a new business inspiration. Unlike banks that are supposed to protect their depositor's money by requiring such things as capital and collateral, venture capitalists will invest in good business proposals and take more risk than a bank will. Mitt Romney's company comes to mind but note that not all their investments were successful, most notably a steel mill that failed because they couldn't compete with cheap Chinese steel imports.

Starting a new business obviously involves risk and we only have to look around the county to see closed or failed businesses to understand that.

But, I believe that set up properly, there is room for an investment syndicate to set up shop in Macon County and provide capital to entrepreneurs who have a good idea with a potential of building a new company and putting people to work.

The syndicate would have to be run by really savvy experienced business people who can judge when an idea has promise, headed up by a management group of perhaps 9 citizens who make the decision of what to invest in. A local bank might also be able to offer advice. It would have to draw in investment money from local people who can afford to invest money with the possibility of losing their investment.

Just 100 people willing to invest \$10,000 each would cover a number of potential businesses.

The syndicate would be run by people with mass marketing experience, a solid knowledge of corporate law, tax, copyright and patent law as well. It would take people with vision to judge what will succeed and what may fail and frankly, almost with the ability to see into the future. Who, for example, would have guessed that Microsoft would be hugely successful when they first went into business? Billions of Hula Hoops and Frisbees sold worldwide.

We don't have the railroad and highway infrastructure for heavy manufacturing necessary for that sort of business but we surely can manufacture computer

LETTERS-TO-THE EDITOR-POLICY

We reserve the right to reject or edit submissions.

NO ANONYMOUS LETTERS WILL BE ACCEPTED.

Views expressed are not necessarily those of Highlands Newspaper. Please EMAIL letters by Sunday at 5 p.m. There is a 500-word limit without prior approval.

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...LETTERS continued from page 2

chips or any other item that takes up little space and perhaps any other item that can be sold nationwide.

I like Bob Scott's idea and believe it has lots of merit but needs to be expanded and some people enlisted who can put it together and make it work."

Bob Wilson, Franklin

Science points to a Creator

Dear Editor,

We put our trust and faith into what is true and trusted, the evidence of things proven. Science, when it takes a ideal or hypothesis and continually tests it and if shown true, then establishes a law which we all benefit in its working of everyday life. Even if some of us do not fully understand the workings of these laws we all are governed by. Gravity and energy have been discovered but yet are not fully known where they start or come from. The old science of the past believed our earth was flat and we feared falling off it's edges. As we've grown or caught up in our understanding of how these laws govern our world and universe and how it effects us, we seem to worship our universe, nature or ourselves as we discover in science, something that has always been here. We seem to go to extremes in not wanting to find or recognize the "first cause" that set all this in motion and our place within this, as "In the beginning, God created."

I'm certainly no expert on Biblical studies, and forgoing for a moment the spiritual aspect of the Bible, but the historical and geographical studies of just the people, places, and events that have been proven true and are evident, by archeological diggings and discoverers of historical writings and artifacts, which stand very well on there own. This has tremendous weight in placing credit or a starting point towards taking this seriously as a viable worldview. This was how early science in understanding and acknowledgment of the creator in the discoveries within nature and our universe and how these laws effect and benefit us. All the great universities were based and founded on this, as in Yale, Harvard, Princeton, and the list goes on. These educational systems also studied the opposing worldviews so they could see the sharp contrast and the value in their thinking and reasoning within a creator and created order, which is the complete opposite in university settings today.

We all like to discover, create and explore, but new modern science is much of guessing or hypothesizing and is taken as truth, plus there's one thing science may

not be able to do, and we all want these discoveries for ourselves, and that is to find, "meaning – purpose -- destiny and the truest love," in living out our brief existence... If this cannot be found; for what difference does it make what laws we discover?... Most are not asking how or why the universe exist there asking why and for what purpose "I" exist. Many go though life trying to discover anything that comes close to this, but as Solomon stated, all is vanity,... "there is nothing new under the sun". (Ecclesiastes 1: 1-10)

Education and all views of creation should be shared within the bounds of state and local communities, and we as individuals, parents, or guardians of our children should ask and place values and expect a choice within our educational system as we would all be enriched in family, community, government, and free the individual spirit, which embodies all of us, regardless whether you believe in the Creator or not. Keep Thinking

**Deni Shepard
Franklin**

...TREES continued from page 1

recall talk about tree removal during the presentation, but said Ross discussed trimming some trees in previous discussions.

As soon as Ward heard of the incident, he ordered the work stopped.

When queried, President and Managing Director of Old Edwards Hospitality Group Richard Delany said he wasn't certain of all the details or of the permitting procedure since that was being handled by Tate Landscaping. He said he was under the impression that the arborists and Appalachian Tree Company said the trees that were removed were white pine and hemlocks that were either dead or "significantly decayed or diseased."

"Obviously, we want to keep as many trees as possible in place to protect the guests from Main Street noise and soften their views but as I mentioned I was under the impression from the arborist's inspection that these trees had seen better days," he said.

According to the Unified Development Ordinance concerning tree removal permits, on commercial projects – regardless of whether a tree is healthy or diseased – the removal of any tree over eight inches in diameter requires a tree removal permit. To get the permit a site plan must be submitted showing the location of the proposed trees to be removed and a statement explaining the reason for removal accompanied by an arborist's report substantiating the reason.

• See TREES page 14



The Metropolitan Opera

Prince Igor
by Borodin

Saturday, March 1
Pre-Opera Discussion
11:30am
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• HIGHLANDS DINING •

...HIGHLANDS continued from page 1

grade level, Highlands is once again above the state average, which is 42.3 percent. As a district, third through eight grade students rated significantly lower than the state average, scoring 37.8 percent.

A point of celebration comes for Highlands sixth grade students. While the state average in reading for sixth grade students is 46.4 percent, Highlands students excelled with 69 percent. Sixth graders at Highlands were also far above the state average in math. While the state average for math was 38.9 percent, Highlands scored 75.9 percent. Highlands fourth grade students were also 20 percentage points higher than the state average in both reading and math as well.

The high school level at Highlands tested above both the district and state averages for Math I and Biology. With the Math I state average of 36.3 percent and district average of 36.4 percent, Highlands high school students scored nearly 30 points higher with 62.1 percent. Highlands once again excelled in Biology with 63.3 percent of students scoring at or above grade level, while the district average was 42.8 percent and the state average was 45.6 percent.

During Monday night's board of education meeting, Superintendent Dr. Chris Baldwin stressed the importance of not comparing performance numbers from this year's report cards to those of the past because of the way testing was restructured during the 2012-13 school year. The 2012-13 school year was the first-time students were tested on the new standard course of study, which used revamped assessments and new accountability models to compose report cards.

In addition to how Highlands performed on state assessment models, the annual report cards also looked at class sizes, attendance and schools safety numbers. School attendance was yet another area where Highlands scored above average. With both the state and district attendance average being 95 percent, Highlands students who attended school daily came in at 96 percent.

Macon County's unique geographical location gives the district two of the three K-12 schools in the state. The annual report cards compare schools of similar grade

• See HIGHLANDS page 8

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...COAL ASH continued from page 1

N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources officials' enforcement of federal laws but also a hard look into the agency's personnel records.

So far, nearly two dozen current and former department officials, including DENR's Asheville region supervisors for water quality and aquifer protection, have been included in the subpoenas.

Citing department policy, DENR officials have refused to comment on the subpoenas or the investigation.

The new documents show that a federal grand jury is scheduled to take testimony in mid-March. Ahead of that, prosecutors are seeking personnel and financial records including "documents of payments" and "documents relating to receipt of an item of value" from Duke Energy and Progress Energy and its subcontractors.

The new twist in the investigation came Wednesday shortly before a press conference with DENR Secretary John Skvarla and his three top deputies. Skvarla took roughly 25 minutes laying out DENR's case that it has been a partner with citizen groups and proactive in its response to coal ash before he and his top staff were peppered with questions about the probe and reports that the state has been aware of groundwater contamination at the sites and has yet to act on it.

Skvarla denied news reports that asserted DENR stepped into the coal ash fight to prevent local citizen groups from suing in federal court, including efforts to force a cleanup at two ponds at the Asheville Power Station near Arden on the French Broad River.

"Somehow or another, this perception has been created that we are adversaries to the citizen's groups," Skvarla told reporters in Raleigh on Wednesday, "when in fact we are all on the same side of the table. We are partners. We all have the same outcome in mind."

DENR's decision to sue over the site effectively ended local groups' attempts to clean up the ponds in federal court. The state later worked out a settlement with Duke Energy, fining the company roughly \$99,000 and requiring further study and testing toward eventual mitigation.

In an interview with Carolina Public Press on Tuesday, French Broad Riverkeeper Hartwell Carson said the agreement worked out between DENR and the Duke was a huge disappointment and local organizations sent DENR thousands of letters in opposition. The amount proposed was far too small to do anything about the ponds, which hold two major ponds of coal ash slurry on 91 acres at the Asheville facility.

"Basically, the settlement was so small it couldn't achieve the objectives," he said.

In the wake of the Dan River spill near Eden, DENR has asked the judge in the case to hold the settlement in abeyance.

Sitting in his office in Asheville, DJ Gerken, one of Southern Environmental Law Center's lead attorneys in its coal ash suits, took in the live stream of the conference.

Gerken said he had a difficult time with Skvarla's attempt to portray his administration as proactive in dealing with coal ash ponds and an even harder time when the secretary said DENR had received little in the way of information or interest in cleaning them up.

Skvarla said it was not until late January, shortly after he took office, that the department — responding to inquiries about groundwater contamination — began to focus on the problems at Duke's coal ash ponds.

Gerken said that the department has received numerous inquiries and reports on the danger at the ponds over the years, particularly those in the Asheville area and on the Catawba River.

Environmental groups have documented seeps coming from the ponds and getting into small tributaries that flow into the Catawba and French Broad rivers.

The seeps, Gerken contended, violate the company's discharge permits for the plant and are the source of heavy metals contaminating the waters. That alone, he said, should have triggered action by DENR.

But at the press conference last week, DENR officials said they were still assessing the sites. Division of Water Resources director Tom Reeder said the sampling was questionable in some cases.

Gerken said regardless, rules require that once contaminants have been found to have moved offsite, the state must remove, treat or control in some way the primary source of the pollutant.

"I can guarantee you that everyday small businesses in this state are dealing with that," he said. "The only reason Duke is getting an exception is because they made a very big problem."

Democrat precinct meeting is Tues., March 4 at the Highlands Civic Center



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MET Opera Live in HD at Highlands PAC: Sat., March 1 – Prince Igor by Borodin

It is common in contemporary opera for a director to update the setting of a story and impose some interpretive concept on a piece. Most directors do not go so far,

however, as to reorder scenes, tweak the plot, excise whole ensembles and interpolate musical numbers from a different score. But the Russian director Dmitri Tcherniakov essentially

does all of this in the Metropolitan Opera's Prince Igor. His wonderful staging is dreamlike, wrenchingly human and viscerally theatrical. The impressive cast, with many Russian singers, is headed by the compelling bass Ildar Abdrazakov in the title role.

The libretto, written by Borodin, is based on an anonymous 12th-century epic poem. Actually, the basic plot is straightforward: Igor, an ancient Russian prince in the city of Putivl, gathers his army for a campaign against the nomadic Polovtsians, who have been ravaging the Russian territories. Igor's troops are defeated, and he and Vladimir, his son, are taken captive. Vladimir falls in love with the sensual daughter of Khan Konchak, the ruler of the Polovtsians, who sees in his captive a potential ally, if only Igor will seek a truce. Vowing to continue the fight, Igor escapes. He returns to a city in ruins and feels like a failure. Still, his people hail his return.

Prince Igor by Borodin will be presented beginning at 12 noon. The Pre-Opera discussion lead by Beverly Pittman will begin at 11:30am. Tickets: Adults \$24 and students are FREE due to the generosity of our underwriters. Tickets are available online: highlandspac.org or by calling 828.526.9047 Highlands PAC 507 Chestnut Street Highlands

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Highlands High School principal, Brian Jetter and Ronnie Spilton collaborated their efforts to be able to offer this course to the Highlands High School. Fourteen students enrolled in the Highlands School's new theater class. The 14 students enrolled are pictured here on the stage set of Weekend Comedy at PAC with Kelly Pla and Dr. Ronnie Spilton. The NC State curriculum for theater classes was researched, a grant was awarded by the Community Foundation of Western NC and a "teacher of record" was found in English teacher Kelly Pla. Students will be bused from the school to PAC three days a week and Pla will teach the class at the school the other two days. Ms. Pla is an English teacher at Highlands School.



'Weekend Comedy' full of laughs

A "Weekend Comedy" by the Highlands Cashiers Players, runs through this Sunday only. It's the perfect

antidote for the winter blues and will have you laughing for days.

Some of last week's patrons were heard to say: "My husband laughed so hard he embarrassed me."

"Oh my gosh, everyone was so good. I had tears rolling down my face."

"There were so many great lines. I think I need to see it again."

"The set! I think it's one of the best Highlands Cashiers Players has ever done."

Clearly, everyone who has seen "Weekend Comedy" enjoyed themselves and you will, too.

Starring Ricky Siegel, Robin Phillips, Taylor Crawford and Kevin Murphy, "Weekend Comedy" is filled with fast-paced dialogue and impeccable comedic timing; and is perfect for anyone who has experienced the challenges of being in a relationship - be it 2 years or 52.

This is the last week for "Weekend Comedy." It runs this Friday and Saturday at 7:30 with the Sunday matinee at 2:30 at Highlands PAC on Chestnut Street. For tickets call the Highlands Cashiers Players box office at 828-526-8084.

HCP **HIGHLANDS/CASHIERS**
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PRESENTS



BY:
JEANNE
AND
SAM BOBRICK

DIRECTED BY:
RICKY SIEGEL

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...HIGHLANDS continued from page 4

ranges, making the comprising numbers slightly skewed due to the lack of K-12 schools. In regards to school size, the district's K-12 schools average 218 students while the state average is 441. Highlands sits in the middle with 330 students.

The annual report also tracked the number of acts of crime or violence reported in school, at a bus stop, on a school bus, on school grounds, or during off-campus, school-sponsored activities. Out of Highlands' 330 students, there were

...DELINQUENT continued from page 1

Staff also presented utilities that have been uncollectible since 2011, 2012 and 2013 – with potential write-off dates of 2015, 2016 and 2017, respectively.

“The ones to be possibly written off next year will pass their 3-year collection limit at the end of December 2014 and will be written off in early 2015 – those are the ones the board wants to publish the names of,” said Frye.

Though commissioners agreed their hands were tied concerning the 2013 accounts in arrears, they weren't willing to give up on the potential write-offs for 2015-2017.

Currently, those amounts are: for 2015 – \$26,710.44, for 2016 – \$15,874.86 and for 2017 – \$2,285.48.

Frye and Mayor Patrick Taylor said the amounts of uncollectable bills will decrease and likely level out to \$2,000 or \$3,000 a year, because the town has put a strict collection/cut-off policy in place so outstanding bills will no longer be incurred.

“We are vigorously following our

zero schools safety violations reported. The state average for similar schools was .4 percent.

Teacher accountably is also a concentration of study for the reports. According to this year's report cards, of Highlands' 35 classroom teachers, 97 percent were full licensed with 100 percent of classes being taught by highly qualified teachers. Seventeen percent of teachers at Highlands have advanced degrees and a total of six teachers are National Board Certified. More than

policy now,” said Town Clerk Rebecca Shuler.

At March's Town Board meeting, commissioners will consider allocating an annual write-off amount – as suggested by auditors Martin Starnes – but they asked Frye to return with a firmer number.

For the interim, Commissioner John Dotson suggested a more aggressive approach.

“I understand we are stuck with this year's because by the state statute we are required to write these off, but as to '15, '16, '17, why don't we put a list in the newspaper just like the county does for delinquent taxes – just in case our collection letters didn't get to them? I won't vote to write these off without that contingency going forward and I want to do it a couple of times a year.”

Commissioner Donnie Calloway said he was shocked to see such numbers.

“How did we get to this point?” he asked.

Frye reminded the board that last year the number in uncollectables was closer to \$220,000 which is why his staff got more stringent about collecting.

He said everyone is contacted and given 30 days to pay their utility bill. After that, power is cut off and in 60 days they are put into debt service which means a lien is put on their tax returns and they can't collect any lottery winnings.

Mayor Taylor said the current policy keeps this from ever happening again. “Once they get behind, their power is cut so we won't get these big amounts,” he said.

Shuler said the 2016-writeoff list is the last batch of bad debt Frye's staff has inherited. “Of those on the list, several are bankrupt, some were renters, and some represent businesses that closed.”

Attorney JK Coward was asked to investigate whether the town can put liens on property against utilities or sewer connection accounts.

Sewer Connections

The town has 11 outstanding sewer

half (66 percent) of teachers have 10 or more years of teaching experience.

Highlands sits below both the state and district average for teacher turnover rate as well. With the state average being 17 percent and the district average being 16 percent, Highlands comes in the lowest at 15 percent.

“With the transition to the new Common Core, new assessments, and a new school accountability model, combined with less money from the state, the 2012-13 school year had a lot of challenges for schools. Highlands School is proud of the

connection agreements. Each resident has had three years to pay the town the \$2,500 for hook-up to the town sewer system. To date the customers have refused to pay these fees.

“We have reached an impasse and they have ignored all attempts from the town to collect what is owed,” said Town Manager Bob Frye.

According to Attorney Coward, since connecting to the town sewer was an agreement entered into with the town, the town can turn off their water, which renders their sewer system useless.

Town Clerk Shuler said each has received monthly statements and nasty letters for 12 months to no avail.

The town embarked on two sewer projects over the last several years – one in the Mirror Lake region and one in the Harris Lake region – both for environmental reasons.

If residents agreed to participate, they signed an agreement and the town paid for all infrastructure and the individual grinder pumps. Residents were asked to just pay the \$2,500 connection fee but had three years to pay it.

Residents living within the project area didn't have to agree, but stood to save about \$10,000 if they agreed to let the town hook them up.

“Our connection policy is ‘mandatory’ but it's not, really,” said Public Service Administrator Lamar Nix. “Letters were sent out requesting participation outlining the timeline for payment of the \$2,500, but if they chose not to participate after a certain amount of time, they would have to pay a ‘user fee’ which is double the water bill.”

There were 140 residents in the Mirror Lake project and 135 chose to connect; there were 105 in the Harris Lake project and only one chose not to connect.

According to the town, the 11 who refuse to pay signed the agreement to participate in the project. They are connected and are receiving sewer service.

Commissioner Brian Stiehler, a resident who participated in the Mirror Lake Sewer Connection Project, said he wanted

positives illustrated on our school report card,” said Principal Brian Jetter. “While we will continue to work at increasing student achievement in the above listed positive areas, we have areas in which we need immediate, focused improvement in student achievement. Our goal is to have student achievement that is higher than the District and State in every area that is measured on the State Report Card.”

To view the full report for Macon County Schools visit the website at ncreportcards.org/scr.

to make sure the 11 got fair warning that their water would be turned off if they don't make an effort to pay.

Again Shuler said her office inherited all this and has been letting people pay \$75-\$100 a month.

“We have had great response from most, but these 11 are the ones who have ignored us and from whom we have had no response at all.”

In the end, the board suggested sending each a registered letter instructing them to come in within 30 days to make a minimum payment (no less than \$75 monthly). If they don't come in, the town will turn off the water and lock the box.

“There will be no water in the house and sewer doesn't work without water,” said Attorney Coward.

Frye said running sewer in Highlands is expensive so the town has to have revenue coming in. The policy is, if the town runs a trunk line within 200 feet of a home, residents have to hook on or pay user fees.

“We have tried to be flexible with these people but they just won't pay,” he said.

Again Commissioner Dotson suggested a lien on the property. “This constitutes services, not utilities,” he said. “I think we need to put a lien on property and then talk about a payment plan.”

Commissioner Calloway said the town is a business. “We were lax...now we are going to cut you off.”

– Kim Lewicki

Healthcare presentation at MC Library Saturday

With the March 31 deadline approaching for all Americans to have access to health insurance through the Affordable Care Act (ACA), Mountain Projects is hosting a free seminar Saturday, March 1, 10 a.m. at the Macon County Public Library to explain and review how the ACA may impact health care coverage for individuals and businesses.

This free seminar will review the individual mandate in detail, discussing the benefits, the penalties, and the tax implications of the ACA.



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Renting in the mountains

By Jeannie Chambers
Chambers Realty & Vacation Rentals

Most everyone knows that the Highlands Plateau and Cashiers Valley have long been a refuge for summer visitors, and over the years homeowners have 'opened up' their homes as seasonal and vacation rentals. That is not what this article is about, but rather a different type of rental animal- the long-term rental; same species, different animal.

In our area, there is a true need for long-term rental homes. There have been committees, public meetings held, etc., but the need is still there. Our mountain region is different, and the people and the homes here are hard to place in a 'working model'. We think that's a good thing, and most of the time it works in our favor because it makes us unique and part of what keeps driving people to our area. We don't want to be 'like everyone else'. So instead of trying to come up with 'affordable housing'- can we not just come up with 'housing'? Most people that are looking for long-term rentals aren't 'needy', except for the need of reasonable rents in homes that suit their needs. Today's rental prospects are everything from wait staff in our local restaurants, construction workers, retail shop owners/workers, golf and tennis pros, attorneys, nurses and doctors. Most have families here with them either part-time or full time.

So what exactly do the renters want, and how may that affect you? There are about as many types of renters as there are types of rental homes, the only problem is there are many more renters than there are homes to put them in. It seems the average person seeking a rental home in our area wants: close to town, two to three bedrooms, allows pets, a home that is winter hearty, and of course, the price must be right. Let's look at these one by one. 1) Close to town can mean walk to town, or just a home that has good year round access. 2) Sure, there's a need for people that can use a studio apartment, as well as homes for larger families, but 2-3 bedroom homes are the most sought after. 3) Whether a tenant has a pet at the start of their lease or not, most of the time the question will arise during the lease. 4) Winter hearty home. You may want to have a plumber inspect water pipes, and/or have a contractor tell you if your windows, walls and floors are insulated enough. A renter that is paying a 'normal' utility bill of \$150-\$200 may find those bills easily doubling in the winter, even when they are using the heat frugally, a fact that if not disclosed,

may send the renters looking for a 'better' situation. 5) Pricing in our area is often decided by supply and demand, but not when pricing long-term rentals. By that method a 3BR long-term prime location rental may see a going rate of \$3,000! (Probably resulting in an empty home). Just because there's an inflated need doesn't mean available homes can price accordingly. It's all according to the home and location of course; that same home in actuality would probably rent in the range of \$800 to \$1800+ per month. Yes that IS a big range, but again, it's all according to the house and location.

Now we get to the 'how may that affect you' part. Those of us who have neighbors usually like to know who our neighbors are but we also like our privacy. Most of the condominiums and town homes in our area have rental limits to prohibit a transitory style neighborhood, thus making them ideal for long term rentals, but we've found most families want a home, with some space for them to enjoy the outdoors. But then again, there's a need for both.

Of course the main drawback to renting your home year round is you can't be here! What if there was a way you COULD be here AND rent your home at the same time? Consider: 1) Buy another house. With the interest rates still low, and prices still low, it may be a possibility. Perfect case scenario, you would like to move here 'someday,' but can't get here fulltime just yet, buy a home to rent while you're waiting to get here. There are a several homes on the market right now under \$250,000. Your rental home could just about pay for itself by renting it year round. When rented, you still have to pay your home insurance, property taxes and homeowner association dues, but the renter usually pays all the utilities. (When you offer your home as a vacation rental you get to use your home, but you also pay all the expenses

If you are looking for a long-term rental - shop around; there are several real estate offices that may be able to help you. If our office doesn't have anything to offer, we always suggest running a small ad in the newspaper. Someone may see your ad that hadn't thought of renting before. If you are considering offering your home as a long-term rental, do your homework. If you want a local person to handle the rental, call or ask around for the right broker to handle your property. There is a need, and you can help fill that need.

• Jeannie and Tucker Chambers are owners/Brokers of Chambers Realty & Vacation Rentals, located at 401 N. Fifth Street in Highlands. 526-3717

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• SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING •

Shrove Tuesday anyone?

By Father Bruce Walker

Episcopal Church of the Incarnation

In the United States, outside of Episcopal, Lutheran, Roman Catholic and some Methodist circles, Shrove Tuesday is something of a forgotten observance. Yet all over the world, people from many nations will be observing the day in one way or another.

Shrove Tuesday is the day preceding Ash Wednesday which is the first day of Lent. Lent is the most penitential season of the church year and is marked by prayer, fasting and alms giving. Shrove Tuesday is traditionally set aside as the last day to prepare for these Holy Days by making a proper confession. However, most people use the day to get one last party in.

Our way of observing, at the Church of the Incarnation, has traditionally been one along the lines of our neighbors in New Orleans – that way being Mardi Gras. Parties are fun! This year we are changing things up a bit and inviting everyone in town to come and celebrate this Feast Day with us. Oh, a couple more changes to mention, we will be serving pancakes instead of gumbo and milk/juice instead of beer.

The term Mardi Gras is French for Fat Tuesday. It refers to the practice of using up all the rich and fatty foods before the fasting to come in the Lenten season. So there is another way to celebrate the day and that is with pancakes.

Pancakes come in handy because they are a way to use up rich foods such as eggs, milk, and sugar, before the fasting season of the 40 days of Lent. In case you are still wondering, this fasting emphasizes eating plainer food and refraining from food that would give pleasure: In many cultures, this means no meat, dairy, or eggs.

In Australia, the United Kingdom, Ireland and New Zealand, Shrove Tuesday is also known as “Pancake Day” as it is a common custom to eat pancakes as a meal. So, if it is good for the Brits and Aussies and Irish, it surely couldn’t hurt us.

There is another very important reason to change things up a bit this year.

We are partnering with our friends at Highlands United Methodist Church to host this event. One reason is to simply socialize, but another is to do a little fundraising for the newly formed Gordon Center for Children. The Center is a joint venture of our churches to address the needs for child care in our community. We are excited about this new ministry and look forward to our work together in the coming years. This is good for the whole community!

So, come and share some good food, fun and fellowship. The date is March 4 and we will be flipping pancakes from 5-8pm. All are welcome and any donation appreciated.

• MILESTONE •

Danielle Puchacz, Highlands School graduate and daughter of Jennifer Royce and Tom Puchacz, was named to the Dean’s List for the Fall Semester at Newberry College.

Proverbs 3:5

• PLACES TO WORSHIP • John 3:16

BLUE VALLEY BAPTIST CHURCH
Rev. Oliver Rice, Pastor (706) 782-3965
Sundays: School – 10 a.m., Worship – 11
Sunday night services every 2nd & 4th Sunday at 7
Wednesdays: Mid-week prayer meeting – 7 p.m.

BUCK CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH
828-269-3546
Rev. Jamie Passmore, Pastor
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Catered dinner - Wed. 6pm
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Church: 706-746-2999
Sundays: 10 a.m. – Worship
Holy Communion 1st Sunday of the month
Wednesdays: 9 a.m. Healing and Prayer w/Holy Communion

CHRIST ANGLICAN CHURCH
Rector: Jim Murphy, 252-671-4011
464 US Hwy 64 east, Cashiers
Sun.: Christian Education, 9 a.m.(Bucks in Cashiers) Family
Worship with music and Communion, 10:30 a.m.
Mon.: Bible Study & Supper at homes - 6 p.m.
Wed.: Men’s Bible Study -8:30 a.m., First Baptist Church

CHRIST CHURCH OF THE VALLEY, CASHIERS
Pastor Steve Kerhoulas
Sun.10:45am, S.S 9:30am. Wed. 6pm supper and teaching.
Tue. Guys study 8am, Gals 10am.

CLEAR CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH
Pastor Jim Kinard
Sundays: School – 10 a.m.; Worship – 11
Wednesdays – 7 p.m.

COMMUNITY BIBLE CHURCH
www.cbchighlands.com • 526-4685
3645 Cashiers Rd, Highlands, NC
Senior Pastor Gary Hewins
Sun.: 9:30am: Sunday School
10:30am: Middle & High School; 10:45am: Children’s Program.,
10: 45am: Worship Service
Wed.: 5pm Dinner (\$7 adult, \$2 child), 6pm CBC University

EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF THE INCARNATION
Rev. Bruce Walker • 526-2968
Sundays: Education and choir rehearsal, 9 am, Holy Eucharist
Rite II, (sanctuary), 10:30
Wednesday: 10 a.m., Morning Prayer
Thursdays: Holy Eucharist, (chapel), 10 am

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
Dr. Mark Ford, Pastor • 526-4153
Sun.: Worship 10:45 a.m.; School – 9:30 a.m.
Wed.: Men’s Bible Study 8:30 a.m., Prayer Meeting – 6:15 p.m., Choir – 5 p.m.

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Dr. Lee Bowman, Pastor • 526-3175
Sun.: Worship – 11 a.m.; School – 9:30
Mondays: 8 a.m. – Men’s Prayer Group & Breakfast
Wednesdays – Choir – 7

GOLDMINE BAPTIST CHURCH
(Off Franklin/Highlands Rd) • Rev. Carson Gibson

HIGHLANDS ASSEMBLY OF GOD
Randy Reed, Pastor
828-421-9172 • 165 S. Sixth Street
Sundays: Worship – 11

HIGHLANDS CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH
Pastor Dan Robinson
670 N. 4th Street (next to the Highlands Civic Center)
Sunday: Morning Worship 10:45 a., Evening Worship, 6:30 p.
Wednesday: Prayer Service, 6:30 p.

HIGHLANDS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
Pastor Paul Christy 526-3376
Sun: School 9:45a.; Worship 9:09 & 10:50.; Youth 5:30 p.
Wed: Supper; 6; 7:15 – children, youth, & adults studies; 6:15 –
Adult choir (nursery provided for Wed. p.m. activities)
Thurs:12:30 – Women’s Bible Study (nursery)

HOLY FAMILY LUTHERAN CHURCH – ELCA
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2152 Dillard Road – 526-9741
Sundays: Sunday School and Adult discussion group 9:30 a.m.;
Worship/Communion – 10:30

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MACEDONIA BAPTIST CHURCH
8 miles south of Highlands on N.C. 28 S in Satolah
Pastor Troy Nicholson, (828) 526-8425
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Choir – 6 p.m.
Wed: Bible Study and Youth Mtg. – 7 p.m.

MOUNTAIN SYNAGOGUE
St. Cyprian’s Episcopal Church, Franklin
828-369-9270 or 828-293-5197

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743-2583
Independent Bible Church
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Ridge Road (4.5 miles from NC 107)
Weds: Bible Study 6:30 p.m.; Youth Group 6 p.m.

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SCALY MOUNTAIN BAPTIST CHURCH
Rev. Dwight Loggins
Sundays: School –10 a.m.; Worship –11 a.m. & 7
Wednesdays: Prayer Mtg. – 7 p.m.

SCALY MOUNTAIN CHURCH OF GOD
290 Buck Knob Road; Pastor Alfred Sizemore • 526-3212
Sundays: School – 10 a.m.; Worship – 10:45 a.m.; Worship – 6 p.m.
Wed: Adult Bible Study & Youth – 7 p.m.

SHORTOFF BAPTIST CHURCH
Pastor Rev. Andy Cloer
Sundays: School – 10 a.m.; Worship – 11
Wednesdays: Prayer & Bible Study – 7

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Religious Education - 11 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.
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WHITESIDE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Rev. Sam Forrester/Cashiers
Sunday School – 10 am, Worship Service – 11 am

• BUSINESS / ORGANIZATION NEWS •

15 WNC properties receive 2014 AAA 4-diamond distinction

This is OEI's ninth year; and Madison's fifth year

AAA Carolinas honored 13 hotels and two restaurants at the AAA Four Diamond Awards for Western North Carolina during a ceremony at the Grand Bohemian Hotel Asheville, Autograph Collection on Tuesday, Feb. 18.

Four Diamond hotels in Western North Carolina, listed with the number of years won, include:

• **ASHEVILLE** – 1889 WhiteGate Inn & Cottage (3 years), Biltmore Village Inn (3 years), Hilton Asheville Biltmore Park (4 years), 1900 Inn on Montford (5 years), Grand Bohemian Hotel, Autograph Collection (5 years), Albemarle Inn (11 years), Inn on Biltmore Estate (13 years) and The Grove Park Inn (13 years)

• **BANNER ELK** – Lodges at Eagles Nest by Ashmore Luxury Rentals (3 years)

• **BOONE** – Lovell House Inn (17 years)

• **GLENVILLE** – Innisfree

Bed & Breakfast By-The-Lake (20 years)

• **HIGHLANDS** – Old Edwards Inn and Spa (9 years)

• **LAKE TOXAWAY** – Greystone Inn (28 years)

Four Diamond restaurants in Western North Carolina, listed with the number of years won, include:

• **BOONE** – Gamekeeper Restaurant & Bar (7 years)

• **HIGHLANDS** – Madison's Restaurant and Wine Garden (5 years)

"AAA's requirements for a Four Diamond rating are rigorous, and those that achieve this designation are among the finest hotels and restaurants in the world," said David E. Parsons, president and CEO of AAA Carolinas. "Only 3.4 percent of the more than 59,000 annual inspections conducted nationally result in a Four Diamond rating."

The AAA Four Diamond

Awards are given out in three separate ceremonies around the state. The Charlotte Area Four Diamond Awards ceremony was held on Jan. 14 and the Central and Eastern North Carolina Four Diamond Awards were held on Feb. 6. A total of 35 hotels and 15 restaurants throughout North Carolina have achieved this rating.

AAA gives the Four Diamond Awards annually to qualified hotels and restaurants in North America. More than 2,000 properties nationally earn the Four Diamond ratings after specially trained evaluators conduct anonymous overnight stays or dine incognito.

Lodgings include eight different classifications, such as bed and breakfast, hotel, cottage and country inn with four sub-classifications such as historic, classic, resort and casino. Restaurants have varying cuisines and ambiances, with more than 100 differ-

ent categories.

Each restaurant and lodging that receives any level of diamond rating from AAA is listed

in AAA's TourBooks, which are distributed for free to any of the organization's 53 million members nationwide.

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Jane Hipps running for NC Senate

With over 230 supporters in attendance last Thursday evening Jane Hipps of Waynesville officially announced her candidacy to run against Jim Davis for the North Carolina Senate.



Having spent over 38 years in public education, Hipps stated that she understands first hand what it means to be an educator. Working first as a vocational rehabilitation counselor in Haywood County and eventually as a science consultant for the Western Area Regional Alliance, she has been a school psychologist, a teacher, a program developer, and a National Math and Science Consultant. Hipps stated that while she looks at her time in the classroom with pride, she believes recent moves of our North Carolina Legislature have left monumental concerns.

Hipps said she is running for the NC Senate because she is concerned about the future of this State. She highlighted how

opportunities for our children have been eroded by the massive cuts and threats to public education,

including the community colleges and universities. Hipps stated that the impact of these cuts at the local level has meant that our counties have fewer teachers, teacher assistants and assistant principals.

Hipps said "it is time that we in western North Carolina join together and rebuild the public education program in this great State. Let's pay our teachers a winning wage. Let's reward those who seek advanced certification and degrees. And, let's get back to the business of building a better North Carolina."

Ron Robinson running for NC Senate

Ron Robinson has announced his candidacy for District 50 NC Senate seat. He based his campaign on the principles that "Every Person Matters" and "Common Sense Solutions."

He focused on supporting our teachers, funding our schools and recruiting companies with good paying jobs. He promised to restore Medicaid for our neighbors in need. He intends to represent everyone, not just the fortunate few, and bring prosperity to our seven counties.

Robinson said that Senator Jim Davis, a Republican, has done nothing more than rubber stamp legislation written by wealthy outsiders and rammed through our General Assembly by one of the wealthiest men in NC, Art Pope. Robinson believes that by working together we can make WNC a better place to live.

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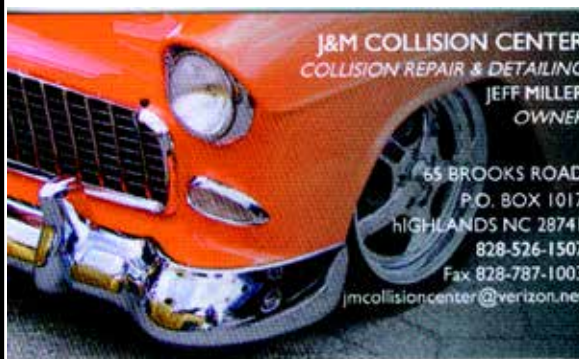


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• POLICE & FIRE REPORTS •

Highlands PD log entries from Jan. 21. Only the names of persons arrested, issued a Class-3 misdemeanor, or public officials have been used.

Jan. 21

- At 8:50 a.m., officers were notified about someone trying to cash a check on a closed account at the Farmers Market.

Jan. 26

- At 5:20 p.m., officers were called to a church on N. 4th Street concerning the possible abduction of a body.

Jan. 31

- At 9:50 p.m., officers responded to a call on Main Street concerning a verbal argument between two people.

Feb. 3

- At 9 a.m., officers were notified of larceny from The Bascom.

- At 4 p.m., officers were notified of about mail fraud when a resident received an empty package at the post office.

Feb. 5

- At 8:30 a.m., officers were called to Highlands Fire & Rescue concerning a burglary with forced entry.

- At 3:34 a.m., officers were notified about criminal

damage to property at Old Edwards Inn where a champagne glass was thrown off the top of a building.

- At 1:50 a.m., officers were notified of the theft of a truck from N. 4th Street when someone without authorization drove it away.

Feb. 6

- At 8:51 a.m., officers were called to a residence on Three 4 Lane concerning an 85-year-old man who had died in the residence.

Feb. 13

- At noon, officers responded to a one-vehicle accident on NC 28.

The Highlands Fire & Rescue Dept. log entries from Feb. 19

Feb. 19

- At 1:42 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Oak Street. There was no transport.

- At 4:48 p.m., the dept. was first-responders to The Ugly Dog Pub.

Feb. 20

- At 1:52 p.m., the dept. responded to a call about a tree across the road at US 64 west and Walden Way.

- At 5:08 p.m., the dept. responded to a C02 alarm at a residence on NC 106.

- At 5:45 p.m., the dept. responded to a C02 and fire alarm at a resident on NC 106.

Feb. 21

- At 5:45 a.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on NC 106.

- At 9:33 a.m., the dept. provided mutual aid to Cashiers Fire Dept. on a structure fire on Owen Mountain Road.

Feb. 24

- At 8:24 a.m., the dept. responded to a C02 alarm at a residence on Hickory Nut Gap Road.

- At 9:28 a.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Cullasaja Club Drive.

- At 11:54 a.m., the dept. was first-responders to a residence on Brooks Road. EMS transported.

- At 11:54 p.m., the dept. responded to a fire alarm at a residence on Clubhouse Drive.

Bob Fisher to be Interim Director at The Bascom

T. Wayne Davis, Chairman of the Board of The Bascom, announced that the board had unanimously approved Bob Fisher as its Interim Executive Director. He has agreed to assume responsibility effective immediately.

"The Board has taken this action so that the formal search for a replacement for retiring Executive Director, Jane Jerry, can now continue unpressured by time prior to the beginning of another outstanding season in 2014. Bob Fisher is well known to the plateau community and has a unique passion for, and understanding of the workings of The Bascom, having served as Chairman of The Bascom from 2004 to 2010," Davis said.

Fisher and Jerry will co-host an Open House for the residents of Highlands and Cashiers on Saturday, March 1 from 5 to 7 pm at The Bascom so guests can ask questions, make comments and learn more about plans for The Bascom moving forward.



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Owner of Tate Landscaping Jim Tate said he made a big mistake by removing the eight trees without town approval and he is 100% responsible.

"As many years as I have served the Town of Highlands on both the Zoning and Planning Boards, you would think that I would be aware of all the rules in regards to removing large trees, but I didn't think there were any regulations against removing dead or diseased trees no matter the size," he said. "In my opinion, this was 100% my mistake and by no means should OEI or Hank Ross be held accountable. This is completely my fault for not dotting the i's and crossing the t's."

According to the arborist report, all eight trees that were removed were either completely dead or diseased. Pictures and explanations submitted by Tate verify the claim.

Town Planner Josh Ward said he issued a notice of violation and levied a \$100 fine. He said no landscape work can continue until all the proper paperwork is in, which will basically outline what has already taken place and any future plans.

Furthermore, he said he will suggest amending the town's fee schedule so that in the future if trees are removed without permission a hefty fine will be levied.

"If a hefty fine accompanies the action, people will realize they did something wrong and furthermore they will hopefully think before doing it," he said.

Tate said he made a simple, but very meaningful mistake and will suffer the consequences accordingly.

Removed were three white pine, one locust and four hemlocks - all either dead, damaged or decayed.

- Kim Lewicki

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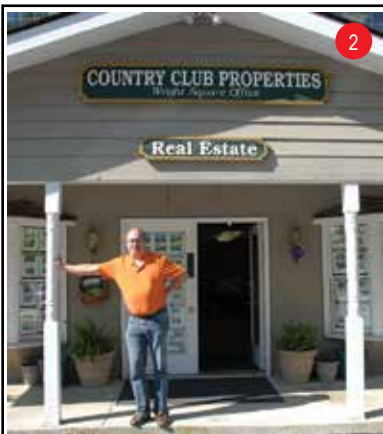
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